SŪRAH 55

Al-Raḥmān

(The Lord of Grace)

Prologue

The composition of this Makkan *sūrah* has a special and prominent pattern. Essentially, it provides a general announcement, made in the open space of the universe, highlighting the blessings God bestows from on high. These are easily discernible in the beauty of everything He has created, in the great favours He grants to all, in the way He controls all existence, and in the fact that all creatures look up to see His face, etc. It is an invitation to all the universe to be witnesses against the two worlds of *jinn* and humans. Both are addressed in this *sūrah* on an equal basis, in the presence of all creatures in this vast universe. Both are challenged to deny, if they can, any of God's blessings. The challenge is repeated after every single blessing mentioned, each with their detailed aspects. The great universe, then, is the stage where all these blessings are exhibited.

The distinctive ring of the announcement is apparent in the *sūrah*'s structure as also in the endings of its verses, with a final rising note in each, coupled with a long vowel pointing far. It is also apparent in the opening of the *sūrah*, which gives an air of expectation of what will follow. It begins with a single word, *al-Raḥmān*, as a subject without a predicate. This word, which is a name and an attribute of God that we

translate as *the Lord of Grace*, stresses mercy and adds emphasis to the announcement. Beyond that, the *sūrah* is a great exhibition of God's grace and blessings.

The first blessing put forward in this great exhibition is the teaching of the Qur'ān, the greatest favour God has bestowed on man. This is mentioned ahead of man's own creation as also his faculty of speech, his most important and distinctive quality. The *sūrah* then opens up pages of the universe that show God's blessings: the sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the skies, the balance, the earth and what it contains of fruit, dates, grains and aromatic plants, the *jinn*, mankind, the two risings and the two settings, the two great bodies of water and the barrier between them, what is taken out from them and what goes through them. When these great pages have been shown in full, the *sūrah* then adds an image showing them all as perished, where no creature is left alive yet God's face remains full of majesty. To Him all creatures turn awaiting His decision regarding them.

Against the background of these two extremes of absolute extinction and absolute presence, a fearsome warning is issued to both man and *jinn*: "*We shall attend to you two huge communities [of* jinn *and mankind]. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* Jinn *and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so. You cannot pass beyond them without [God's] authority. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? A flash of fire will be sent against you, and molten brass, and you will be left without support. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verses 31–36)

This is followed by a scene of the end, i.e. the Day of Judgement, against a backdrop of the universe in which we see the sky flowing with the colour of a red rose, and the suffering endured by evildoers. A long and detailed scene of the reward given to the God-fearing then follows. This great exhibition of God's blessings aptly concludes with a verse that says: "*Blessed is the name of your Lord, full of majesty, granting grace.*" (Verse 78)

Al-Raḥmān
(The Lord of Grace)

سُورَةُ الرَّحْمَٰنِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

[It is] the Lord of Grace (1)

الرَّحْمَٰنُ ﴿١﴾

who has taught the Qur'ān. (2)

عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ ﴿٢﴾

He created man (3)

خَلَقَ الْإِنسَانَ ﴿٣﴾

and taught him to articulate thought and speech. (4)

عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ ﴿٤﴾

The sun and the moon function in due measure. (5)

الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ ﴿٥﴾

The stars and the trees prostrate themselves [before Him]. (6)

وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ ﴿٦﴾

He has raised the skies high, and has set the balance, (7)

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ ﴿٧﴾

so that you may not exceed the balance. (8)

أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ ﴿٨﴾

Weigh, therefore, with justice and do not fall short in the balance. (9)

وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ ﴿٩﴾

He has laid the earth for His creatures, (10)

وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ ﴿١٠﴾

فِيهَا فَٰكِهَةٌ وَٱلنَّخْلُ ذَاتُ ٱلْأَكْمَامِ ﴿١١﴾

with all its fruits, its palm trees with sheathed clusters, (11)

وَٱلْحَبُّ ذُو ٱلْعَصْفِ وَٱلرَّيْحَانُ ﴿١٢﴾

its husked grain and its sweet-smelling plants. (12)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٣﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (13)

خَلَقَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن صَلْصَٰلٍ كَٱلْفَخَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

He created man from dried clay, like pottery, (14)

وَخَلَقَ ٱلْجَآنَّ مِن مَّارِجٍ مِّن نَّارٍ ﴿١٥﴾

and created the *jinn* from raging flames of fire. (15)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٦﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (16)

رَبُّ ٱلْمَشْرِقَيْنِ وَرَبُّ ٱلْمَغْرِبَيْنِ ﴿١٧﴾

He is the Lord of the two risings and the Lord of the two settings. (17)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٨﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (18)

مَرَجَ ٱلْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ ﴿١٩﴾

He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they may meet; (19)

بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَّا يَبْغِيَانِ ﴿٢٠﴾

yet between them is a barrier which they do not cross. (20)

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (21)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢١﴾

Pearls and corals come from both. (22)

يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٢٢﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (23)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٣﴾

His are the lofty ships that sail like floating mountains through the seas. (24)

وَلَهُ الْجَوَارِ الْمُنشَـَٔاتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ ﴿٢٤﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (25)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٥﴾

All that lives on it perishes; (26)

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ﴿٢٦﴾

but forever will remain the face of your Lord, full of majesty, granting grace. (27)

وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٢٧﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (28)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٨﴾

Everyone in heaven and earth entreats Him. Every day He manifests Himself in some wonderful way. (29)

يَسْـَٔلُهُ مَن فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٠﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (30)

سَنَفْرُغُ لَكُمْ أَيُّهَ الثَّقَلَانِ ﴿٣١﴾

We shall attend to you two huge communities [of *jinn* and mankind]. (31)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٢﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (32)

يَٰمَعْشَرَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَن تَنفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ فَانفُذُوا ۚ لَا تَنفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطَٰنٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

Jinn and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so. You cannot pass beyond them without authority. (33)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٤﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (34)

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شُوَاظٌ مِّن نَّارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنتَصِرَانِ ﴿٣٥﴾

A flash of fire will be sent against you, and molten brass, and you will be left without support. (35)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٦﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (36)

فَإِذَا انشَقَّتِ السَّمَآءُ فَكَانَتْ وَرْدَةً كَالدِّهَانِ ﴿٣٧﴾

When the sky is rent asunder and becomes rose-red like [burning] oil. (37)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٨﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (38)

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَّا يُسْـَٔلُ عَن ذَنۢبِهِۦٓ إِنسٌ وَلَا جَآنٌّ ﴿٣٩﴾

On that day neither mankind nor *jinn* will be asked about their sins. (39)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٠﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (40)

يُعْرَفُ ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَٰهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِٱلنَّوَٰصِى وَٱلْأَقْدَامِ ﴿٤١﴾

The guilty ones will be known by their mark and shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet. (41)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٢﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (42)

هَٰذِهِۦ جَهَنَّمُ ٱلَّتِى يُكَذِّبُ بِهَا ٱلْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

This is the hell which the guilty deny. (43)

يَطُوفُونَ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَ حَمِيمٍ ءَانٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

They will go round between its flames and scalding water. (44)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٥﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (45)

وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِۦ جَنَّتَانِ ﴿٤٦﴾

For those who stand in fear of their Lord's presence there shall be two gardens. (46)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٧﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (47)

ذَوَاتَآ أَفْنَانٍ ﴿٤٨﴾

With shading branches. (48)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٩﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (49)

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ تَجْرِيَانِ ﴿٥٠﴾

With a pair of flowing springs. (50)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥١﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (51)

فِيهِمَا مِن كُلِّ فَٰكِهَةٍ زَوْجَانِ ﴿٥٢﴾

With every kind of fruit in pairs. (52)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٣﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (53)

مُتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَىٰ فُرُشٍۭ بَطَآئِنُهَا مِنْ إِسْتَبْرَقٍ ۚ وَجَنَى ٱلْجَنَّتَيْنِ دَانٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

They will recline on carpets lined with rich brocade; and the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach. (54)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٥﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (55)

فِيهِنَّ قَٰصِرَٰتُ ٱلطَّرْفِ لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ
إِنسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَآنٌّ ﴿٥٦﴾

In both [gardens] will be mates of modest gaze, whom neither man nor *jinn* will have touched before. (56)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٧﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (57)

كَأَنَّهُنَّ ٱلْيَاقُوتُ وَٱلْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٥٨﴾

[These mates look] like rubies and corals. (58)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٩﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (59)

هَلْ جَزَآءُ ٱلْإِحْسَٰنِ إِلَّا ٱلْإِحْسَٰنُ ﴿٦٠﴾

Shall the reward of good be anything but good? (60)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦١﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (61)

وَمِن دُونِهِمَا جَنَّتَانِ ﴿٦٢﴾

Besides these two there are two other gardens. (62)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٣﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (63)

مُدْهَآمَّتَانِ ﴿٦٤﴾

Both of the deepest green. (64)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٥﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (65)

With two gushing springs. (66)

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ نَضَّاخَتَانِ ﴿٦٦﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (67)

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٧﴾

With fruits, date-palms and pomegranate trees. (68)

فِيهِمَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَنَخْلٌ وَرُمَّانٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (69)

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٩﴾

There will be in [these gardens] all things most excellent and beautiful. (70)

فِيهِنَّ خَيْرَاتٌ حِسَانٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (71)

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧١﴾

[They will have] dark-eyed and modest companions, sheltered in pavilions. (72)

حُورٌ مَقْصُورَاتٌ فِي الْخِيَامِ ﴿٧٢﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (73)

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٣﴾

Neither man nor *jinn* will have touched them before. (74)

لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ إِنْسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَانٌّ ﴿٧٤﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (75)

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٥﴾

They will recline on green cushions and fine carpets. (76)

مُتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَىٰ رَفْرَفٍ خُضْرٍ وَعَبْقَرِيٍّ حِسَانٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? (77)

فَبِأَيِّ ءَالَآءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٧﴾

Blessed is the name of your Lord, full of majesty, granting grace. (78)

تَبَارَكَ ٱسْمُ رَبِّكَ ذِى ٱلْجَلَـٰلِ وَٱلْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٧٨﴾

Man's Creation and Education

In total, the *sūrah* is a general announcement issued from on high and echoed throughout the universe. Furthermore, it is understood by all who dwell in the universe.

It begins with a verse consisting of one word, *al-Raḥmān*, which we translate as '*the Lord of Grace*'. This opening is intended in meaning, pronunciation and cadence. *Al-Raḥmān:* the word has a ring which is echoed everywhere far and loud. *Al-Raḥmān:* its rising intonation resonates throughout the universe, speaking to every creature. It fills the skies and the earth, and reaches every ear and every heart.

Al-Raḥmān. Just the one word, and the verse is finished. The whole universe hearkens, awaiting the great news that follows this great opening. It comes immediately:

> *[It is] the Lord of Grace who has taught the Qur'ān. He created man and taught him to articulate thought and speech. The sun and the moon function in due measure. The stars and the trees prostrate themselves [before Him]. He has raised the skies high, and has set the balance, so that you may not exceed the balance. Weigh, therefore, with justice and do not fall short in the balance. He has laid the earth for His creatures, with all its fruits, its palm trees with sheathed clusters, its husked grain and its sweet-smelling plants. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* (Verses 1–13)

This is the first section detailing some of the blessings bestowed by the Lord of Grace. It gives the first news after the announcement He "*has taught the Qur'ān.*" This is indeed the highest possible favour that most splendidly reflects God's grace as it is bestowed on man. The Qur'ān is the complete and accurate translation of the laws of the universe and the code of living chosen by heaven for people on earth. It establishes a clear relation between such laws and code, building faith, concepts, values, standards, systems and affairs on the same solid foundation of the universe. It thus gives man comfort, reassurance, understanding and a mutual response with the universe.

The Qur'ān opens up man's senses and feelings to this beautiful universe, just as if it were being seen for the first time. It thus renews people's feelings about their own existence and the existence of the universe around them. It also goes even further than this, giving everything around them life such that it interrelates with humans. Thus wherever man travels or stays, throughout his journey on earth, he finds himself among caring and loving friends.

The Qur'ān instils in people's minds that they are placed in charge of the earth, honoured by God, given the great trust that the heavens, the earth and the mountains were reluctant to undertake. It thus enables them to feel their own value, derived from the fulfilment of their higher human quality that can only be acquired through faith. It is faith that awakens the breath of God's spirit in people's souls and brings alive the highest favour God bestows on man.

The Faculty of Speech

Therefore, the *sūrah* mentions teaching the Qur'ān ahead of man's creation: "*He created man and taught him to articulate thought and speech.*" (Verses 3–4) We will leave aside for now the point of man's creation, as the *sūrah* will presently mention this again. What is specifically intended here is man's teaching so that he is able to express what is in his mind.

We see man speaking and articulating his thoughts, explaining his ideas, and responding to others, but we do not give much thought to this great favour God has granted. It is indeed a great miracle to which

the Qur'ān often alerts us. What is man? How does he begin? And how does he learn to articulate himself?

It is one cell that begins its life journey in the uterus, infinitely small, hardly visible under the microscope, and cannot reveal anything by itself. Yet soon enough this single cell becomes an embryo made up of millions of cells of a great variety: some are bone, some cartilage, flesh, nerve, skin, etc. They make up the different organs with their fascinating functions, such as hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch, and even the most important and greatest of these priceless favours: mental perception, verbal articulation, sensing and inspiration. All this from that microscopic cell: how? With what power? It is all from the Lord of Grace, and by His making.

Let us consider how such articulation occurs, remembering the facts mentioned in the following Qur'ānic verse: "*God has brought you forth from your mothers' wombs devoid of all knowledge, but He has given you hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you may be grateful.*" (16: 78)

The system of speech is an infinitely amazing wonder: the lips, tongue, jaws, teeth, larynx, trachea, bronchi and lungs, all participate in the vocalization process and form a ring in the chain of speech articulation. Greatly amazing as this is, it represents only the mechanical aspect of this highly complex process, which is also related to the brain, hearing and nerves. More significant is the fact that it relates to the mind, which we only know by name. We know nothing about its nature or formation, or even about how it functions.

How does a speaker articulate one word? It is a highly complex process, with numerous steps and stages, involving several organs and systems. In some stages it remains unknown to us. It begins with a feeling of a need to utter this word for a specific purpose. This feeling is transmitted in some unknown way from the faculty of perception, or the mind, or the soul to the action centre, i.e. the brain, which in turn issues a command through the nervous system to utter this word. The word itself is part of what God has taught man, as He gave him its meaning. When the command is made, the lungs expel a measure of air that passes from the bronchi, to the trachea, to the larynx where it goes through the vocal cords. These are incomparably superior to the strings of any man-made musical instrument, and indeed to all musical instruments

with their greatly varied sounds. At the larynx, the air movement makes the sound desired by the brain: high or low, fast or slow, coarse or soft, gentle or sharp, etc. This sound now passes through the mouth where certain pressures are applied at different points. The tongue is so agile at this point that it ensures the production of different sounds through pressures at different points of articulation. All this is needed to utter one word, let alone an expression, a sentence, an idea, past and present feelings, etc. Each one of these is an amazing world, initiated by man, the most extraordinary of creatures. It all comes by the grace of God, the Lord of Grace.

The Sun and the Moon

The *sūrah* moves on highlighting God's favours: "*The sun and the moon function in due measure.*" (Verse 5) The accuracy of each such measure and coordinated movement fills us with wonder as we try to appreciate the facts to which this statement refers. The sun is certainly not the largest celestial body. In open space, to which we can offer no definition of boundaries, there are millions upon millions of celestial bodies, many of which are larger and hotter, and produce more light than the sun. Sirius, for example, is 20 times heavier than the sun, and gives off 50 times more light. Arcturus is 80 times bigger in size than the sun and emanates 8,000 times more light. Other celestial bodies are even greater in size, weight and light. Yet for us, the inhabitants of this little planet earth that rely on the sun for light and heat, the sun is the most important of all of these.

The moon is a small satellite of the earth, but has a great influence on its life. It is indeed the most important element in the tidal movements of the sea.

The sizes of both the sun and the moon, their respective temperatures, distances from us and movement in their orbits are most accurately calculated so as to produce their desirable effects on life on earth. Furthermore, they are placed in their proper respective positions in relation to other celestial bodies.

We will now point out some of the accurate measures regarding life on earth. The sun is 92.5 million miles away from the earth. Had it been

nearer, the earth would have been burnt, or melted or evaporated. Had it been further away, all living creatures on earth would have been frozen. The amount of heat that reaches the earth from the sun represents no more than one of two-million parts of the heat emanating from that body. It is this little fraction only that best suits our life here. Had Sirius, in its present size and heat, been placed in the position of the sun, the earth would have evaporated and been lost in space, long ago.

The same applies to the moon. Had it been larger in size, or nearer in position, the tides it effects in the seas would have drowned everything on earth.

The gravity of both the sun and the moon is also an important factor on the earth's stability, position and movement in space. Our solar system moves in space at a speed of 20,000 miles an hour, heading in one direction. Yet it never collides with any other celestial body.

In this great expanse, not a single star or planet moves even a hairbreadth out of orbit. Absolute balance of size and movement is maintained for all celestial bodies. It is just as God Almighty says: "*The sun and the moon function in due measure.*" (Verse 5)

Submissive Universe

"*The stars and the trees prostrate themselves [before Him].*" (Verse 6) The last reference was to the accurate measure observed in the structure of the great universe. Now the reference is to what direction the universe follows. This brief statement contains a highly inspiring reference to an enlightening and fundamental truth.

There is a bond of worship and submission between this universe and its Creator and Originator, God Almighty. The stars and the trees are two examples of creatures that live in the universe. They give a clear idea of the direction the universe follows. Commentators have different views about the meaning of the word *najm*, or star, which occurs in this verse, with some saying that it refers to the stars in the sky, while others claim that it refers to plants that do not stand erect like trees. Whichever interpretation we take the point this verse stresses is the same, identifying the bond between the universe and its Creator. The universe is a living

creature with a soul that differs in degree and nature from one creature to another, but its essence remains the same.

Long ago, the human heart realized this fact about the universe and its soul. This realization is based on the sensitive quality God gave it. This fact, however, became blurred every time man tried to capture it with his mind, in the light of his own experience. Man, however, has recently been able to recognize the unity of the structure of the universe, but he remains far from understanding the nature of the universe's living soul. Scientists tend to believe that the atom is the unit of the universe, and that the atom is essentially radiation. They also believe that movement is the characteristic common to everything in the universe. It is pertinent to ask, then, what goal does the universe try to achieve?

The Qur'ān says that every apparent step of the universe, which is in essence an expression of its spirit, looks up to its Originator. This is stated in numerous verses of the Qur'ān, such as the one we are discussing: "*The stars and the trees prostrate themselves [before Him].*" (Verse 6) Two other such verses expressing the same idea are as follows: "*The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, as does the earth, and all who dwell in them. Indeed every single thing extols His glory and praise, but you cannot understand their praises.*" (17: 44) "*Are you not aware that it is God whose limitless glory all creatures that are in the heavens and earth extol, even the birds as they spread out their wings? Each of them knows how to pray to Him and to glorify Him.*" (24: 41) To contemplate this truth and observe the universe as it worships and glorifies its Lord gives our hearts a special type of comfort and pleasure. We feel a mutual sympathy with everything around us as all looks up to the Lord, the Creator of all. We feel that we are in a friendly universe where everything and all creatures have the same aim. This is a feeling with far reaching and profound effects.

"*He has raised the skies high, and has set the balance, so that you may not exceed the balance. Weigh, therefore, with justice and do not fall short in the balance.*" (Verses 7–9) The reference to the skies is intended, like all other references in the Qur'ān to the two immediate aspects of the universe, to awaken minds and hearts that have become oblivious to the wonders around them, because of long familiarity. These minds and hearts should look at the universe, appreciate its wonderful beauty, harmony and coordination, and glorify the One who initiated all.

Whatever is meant by the skies, the reference to them lifts our sight to the great space above us, which appears without boundaries, and in which float trillions of huge celestial bodies, yet no collision occurs between them, either individually or in clusters. A cluster may include as many as a billion stars, as in the galaxy which includes our own solar system. Our sun has a diameter of 2.3 million kilometres, yet within our galaxy there are many smaller stars and many that are larger by thousands of times. All these stars and clusters of stars and planets move in space at frightening speeds, but in the great space above they are no more than particles floating far apart from each other.

Along with raising the sky high, God has '*set the balance*' of truth. This is well established so as to define the values of things, events and people. Thus, values are measured by the balance of truth, not according to different, ignorant desires or personal preferences. Moreover, this balance is set within human nature and in the divine message advocated by all God's messengers and defined in the Qur'ān. He has set the balance, "*so that you may not exceed the balance*," going too high or too low. "*Weigh, therefore, with justice and do not fall short in the balance*," so as to ensure justice to all in all situations.

Thus, the truth on earth and in human life relates to the universe and its structure. It relates to the sky in its abstract significance that points to the source of revelation, and in its physical significance as a manifestation of God's infinite power. The two meanings converge to add further inspiration.

"*He has laid the earth for His creatures, with all its fruits, its palm trees with sheathed clusters, its husked grain and its sweet-smelling plants.*" (Verses 10–12) Because we have lived on earth for so long, and we are well familiar with all that is on it, we do not feel the significance of its being '*laid*' for God's creatures, and to enable us to function so comfortably. Therefore, we do not feel the great significance of the stability of the earth and how much grace God has bestowed on us by such stability unless a volcano erupts or an earthquake occurs, filling us with fear. Only at such times do we fully appreciate God's grace in making the earth stable.

Yet people should remember this truth at every moment. They should remember that this planet where they feel so secure is no more than

to suit. Therefore, when God reminds humans and *jinn* of His favour of having created them, He is referring to a blessing that is beyond comprehension.

God – all glory belongs to Him – then states the substances used for creating humans and *jinn*. These are also created by God. Man is created from clay that has dried and gives a sound when beaten with a stick or the human hand. The verse may refer to a stage in the process of creation from dust or clay, or it may simply be a reference to the fact that man and the earth are made of the same material.

> Modern science has proven that the human body contains the same elements as the earth, including carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, phosphorus, sulphur, nitrogen, calcium, potassium, sodium, chlorine, magnesium, iron, manganese, copper, iodine, fluorine, cobalt, zinc, silicon and aluminium. These are the same elements that form dust. Their proportions differ from one person to another. Needless to say, they differ in man from dust. Yet they are the same elements.[1]

What science has proven should not be taken as the ultimate interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. The fact to which the Qur'ān refers may mean what has been scientifically proven, or it may mean something totally different. It may refer to another of the numerous aspects that endorse the meaning of man's creation out of dust, or wet or dry clay.

We stress, most emphatically, that we must not limit the meaning of a Qur'ānic text to a scientific discovery that admits the possibility of error, or the possibility of change with human progress. Some scholars with sincere intentions try to highlight that Qur'ānic statements give identical import to scientific discoveries, proven or still under observation. They cite this as a proof of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. What we say is that the Qur'ān is miraculous, whether its statements are confirmed by scientific discoveries or not. What the Qur'ān says is broader in scope than what science says at any one time. Scientific discoveries are always subject to amendment and change, and sometimes they are proven erroneous. We can certainly use science to broaden our understanding

1. Nawfal, 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Allah wal-'ilm al-Hadīth*, Cairo, (n.d.), p. 180.

of Qur'ānic texts, whenever it explains some aspects of the wonders pertaining to man and the universe. We must not, however, say that a certain Qur'ānic text refers only to a particular scientific discovery. All that we can say is that the scientific discovery may be part of what the Qur'ānic text refers to.

As for the creation of the *jinn* from raging flames of fire, this is something beyond human knowledge. The only source on this is the Qur'ān, given by God who knows what He has created. The fire is described here as *mārij*, which means lit and moving like flames in a windy place. The *jinn* have been given the ability to live on this earth, together with man. However, we do not know how the *jinn* live. What is certain, though, is that they are also addressed by the Qur'ān; it is as much a message to them as it is to man. We explained this in Volume XV, when discussing the verse that says: "*We sent to you a group of* jinn *to listen to the Qur'ān. When they heard it, they said to one another, 'Listen in silence!' When the recitation ended, they returned to their people to warn them.*" (46: 29) This is also confirmed in this *sūrah*.

The address here is to both *jinn* and humans, reminding both of God's blessing in their creation out of their respective origins. This is the central blessing, which brings with it all other blessings. Therefore, it is followed by the comment that signifies putting their testimony on record: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 16) Needless to say, denial is pointless.

"*He is the Lord of the two risings and the Lord of the two settings. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verses 17–18) This reference fills our hearts with great feelings of God's presence, wherever we turn or move, and wherever we look on the wide horizon. Wherever something rises or sets, there is God, the Lord of all, the Sovereign who extends His light and guidance to all. The two risings and two settings may refer to the rising and setting of the sun and the moon, considering that both have already been mentioned in the *sūrah* as part of God's blessings. The verse may also be understood as a reference to the two different positions of sunrise and sunset in summer and winter respectively.

Be that as it may, the import of this reference is more worthy of attention. It points to the fact that God's hand controls stars, planets

and everything else in the universe. His Lordship is seen more clearly on the horizon. When we contemplate universal phenomena and look at the stars rising and setting, our hearts, minds and souls are filled with greater reassurance.

God's Lordship of the two risings and the two settings reflects some of His blessings. Hence, the comment familiar in this *sūrah* is repeated: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 18) The two risings and settings are not only signs pointing to God, but are also part of His blessings granted to humans and *jinn*. They bring much good to all inhabitants of the earth. We see how life begins with the sun rising. It certainly also needs the sunset. Should either one of them, or both, suffer some dysfunction, life itself would be disrupted.

Blessings in Seas and Rivers

We now turn back to the earth and its waters, which God has made in exact measure that determines quantity, type, how it runs and how it is used:

> *He has given freedom to the two great bodies of water, so that they may meet; yet between them is a barrier which they do not cross. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? Pearls and corals come from both. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? His are the lofty ships that sail like floating mountains through the seas. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* (Verses 19–25)

The two bodies of water, expressed in the Arabic text as '*the two seas*', are in fact the salty bodies of water including seas and oceans and the unsalty ones or rivers. God left them free to run and to meet, but did not allow them to exceed their limits. Each will fulfil its own function. In between them there is a barrier of the same nature, which God has put in place. The quantities of water on earth are not the result of any coincidence; they are determined by exact measure. Salty waters cover three-quarters of the earth's surface and they are mostly connected, while dry land represents only about one quarter of the earth. This very large quantity of salty water is the amount needed to keep the earth's atmosphere clean and suitable for supporting life.

> In spite of all the gaseous emanations from the earth of all the ages, most of them poisonous, the atmosphere remains practically uncontaminated and unchanging in its balanced relationship necessary to man's very existence. The great balance wheel is that vast mass of water, the sea.[2]

From this great mass of water evaporation takes place because of the heat of the sun, and what evaporates comes back in the form of rain which is the source of sweet water in all its forms, the most important of which finds its way into rivers. The careful proportion of the vastness of the sea, the heat of the sun, the cold temperatures in the upper atmosphere and other climatic conditions produce rain that provides unsalty waters, which is the mainstay of life for plants, animals and man.

Almost all rivers end in the sea, transporting various salts and compounds from land to sea. Thus, rivers do not change the nature of sea water. Normally rivers run at a higher elevation than sea level. Thus, the sea does not encroach on a river's course, flooding it with salty water. Had that been the case, the nature of rivers would have altered and their function ceased. In between the two there is always this barrier which God has put in place, ensuring that these two water bodies continue to fulfil their respective natural functions. It is no wonder that all this is mentioned here as being among God's great blessings: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 21)

The *sūrah* also adds here some of the blessings God has placed in these two bodies of water, some of which can easily be seen: "*Pearls and corals come from both.*" (Verse 22) The pearl is originally formed by a mollusc animal.

> Perhaps the pearl is one of the most marvellous wonders of the sea. The mollusc goes to the bottom of the sea inside its hard shell which keeps it safe from danger. It is different from other animals in form and life pattern. It has a fine, wonderful net, similar to that of a fisherman, which allows air, water and food to enter, but

2. Morrison, A.C., *Man Does not Stand Alone*, The World's Work, Surrey, p. 28.

stops sand, stone and similarly unwanted objects. Below it are the mouths of the animal, each with four lips. Should a grain of sand or a small stone or a harmful organism get through the net, the mollusc immediately covers it with a sticky discharge which then solidifies to form a pearl. The size of the pearl differs according to the size of the foreign object that finds its way inside.[3]

Coral is among God's amazing creation. It is found in the sea at depths ranging from 5 to 300 metres. It fixes its lower edge to a rock or weeds, keeping its mouth at the top. Around its mouth it has several protrusions used to capture food. Should a little creature touch any of these protrusions, it is immediately paralysed and sticks to the protrusion, which then shrinks and bends towards the coral mouth where the paralysed prey is pushed through a small passage similar to man's oesophagus.

Coral reproduces itself by discharging reproductive cells which fertilize the eggs, and the baby coral will then stick itself to a stone or a weed, starting an independent life like its mother.

Another sign of God's wonderful creation is that corals reproduce in another way, producing extensions that remain stuck to the main body. Thus the coral tree is formed with a wide trunk and narrower branches that may become very fine. The coral tree can reach 30 centimetres in length. Coral concentrations differ in colour: some are orange, some are of red carnation colour, some emerald blue, and others pale and dusty in colour. Red coral is the solid stem that remains after the living part has died. Coral stone-like concentrations can form large colonies. One of these is a chain of coral rocks known as the Great Barrier Reef, to the north east of Australia. The reef is 1,350 miles long and 50 miles wide.[4]

Man makes precious jewellery from both pearls and corals. God mentions both as part of His blessings and the *sūrah* adds here the usual comment: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 23)

3. Nawfal, op. cit., p. 105.
4. Nawfal, ibid., pp. 106–107.

The *sūrah* then mentions the ships that sail through the sea, some of which are very large, looking like mountains: "*His are the lofty ships that sail like floating mountains through the seas.*" (Verse 24) The *sūrah* refers to these floating ships as belonging to God. They indeed sail by God's will. Nothing keeps them afloat in the sea, through its waves and currents except God's care. Hence, they belong to Him. They remain among the great favours with which He blesses human life. They provide a means of livelihood, transportation and comfort that people cannot deny. Hence, the comment: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 25)

The Eternal

Having taken us on this round in the great universe, referring to different types of creatures that will inevitably die, the *sūrah* now mentions the only One who is eternal, and to whom all glory and majesty belong. As we see death overtaking all creatures, we are conscious of the truth of God, the Eternal:

> *All that lives on it perishes; but forever will remain the face of your Lord, full of majesty, granting grace. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* (Verses 26–28)

All sounds become hushed, breathing faint, and limbs stop moving. The air of death spreads over all living creatures, stopping every move throughout the heavens and earth. Only the majesty of the Eternal face overshadows all creatures, time, place and the entire universe. Human expression cannot depict the scene. It cannot add to the Qur'ānic text which gives us a feeling of humble tranquillity, complete silence and total majesty. It paints a scene of total emptiness that leaves the whole universe motionless after it had been bustling with life. Yet it instils in us an image which we cannot understand from our experience but can comprehend. The same comment is added, as the *sūrah* considers the full understanding of this fact to be one of the blessings humans and *jinn* are reminded of: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* (Verse 28)

It is indeed a blessing; nay, it is the source of all blessings. It is this Eternal Existence that creates all and gives them their special characteristics, systems, forms and laws. It is what determines their fate and destiny. God the Eternal is the One who creates, originates, protects and looks after His creation, holds them to account and gives them their reward. It is then the truth of His being the Eternal that gives all blessings. Indeed this world and all its affairs are put in place as a result of the truth of God's eternity while all else comes to an end.

Appeals from All

The truth of God's eternity gives rise to another truth: all creatures are bound to perish and, therefore, they all address everything related to their existence to the One who is without equal, eternal and in control of everything in the universe:

> *Everyone in heaven and earth entreats Him. Every day He manifests Himself in some wonderful way. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?"* (Verses 29–30)

They all address their entreaties and appeals to Him alone because He is the only One to receive such requests. All else will perish, so they cannot be addressed with such appeals. He is the only One to answer requests, and none who appeals to Him alone will ever end in failure. Anyone who entreats or appeals to someone other than God is utterly in error. What can a creature that will inevitably perish do to another who will also perish? What can one in need give to another also in need?

All glory to Him, He manifests Himself every day in a different way. This universe, the limits of which are unknown to us, is in its entirety subject to His will, functioning under His control. Such control applies generally to the universe as a whole, and applies at the same time to every individual creature on its own, and to every organ, cell and molecule in every individual. He gives everything its due, assigns to it its function and watches how it fulfils that function. Such controls monitor every shoot that comes out of the earth, every leaf that falls, every grain in the earth's deep darkness, every fresh or dry thing, every fish at sea, worm in

the ground, every insect, beast or bird in their hiding places, every egg, chick, feather and cell in everything that lives. The One who controls all is never preoccupied with something so as to turn aside from some other thing. Nothing hidden or manifest ever escapes His knowledge. Part of what He controls is the affairs of His creatures on earth, humans and *jinn*. Hence He records this blessing as He addresses them: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 30)

A Frightening Threat

Having stated this fundamental truth of God's eternity while everything else perishes and its correlate making clear that He controls all the affairs of all His creatures, the *sūrah* begins a new section that starts with a threat that sends fear into all hearts. This is a prelude to the discussion of the Day of Judgement that follows later in the *sūrah*:

> *We shall attend to you two huge communities [of* jinn *and mankind]. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* Jinn *and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so. You cannot pass beyond them without authority. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny? A flash of fire will be sent against you, and molten brass, and you will be left without support. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* (Verses 31–36)

"*We shall attend to you two huge communities [of* jinn *and mankind].*" (Verse 31) What a frightening threat that neither man nor *jinn* can face. Indeed firm mountains, stars and galaxies tremble to hear it. God Almighty, in all His power and majesty, says that He will attend to the reckoning of these two humble creatures, man and *jinn*, giving His statement an air of warning! It is unimaginably terrible!

A more literal translation of the threat would say: "We shall be free to attend to you two…" God – limitless is He in His glory – is not preoccupied with something so as to need to free Himself of what preoccupies Him. This is merely an expression intended to make it easier for us to understand, and to deliver the warning in a stunning and crushing way. This entire universe was originated and put in place with

a single word, 'Be', and once the word was uttered the whole universe came into existence. Likewise, its total disappearance needs nothing more than the command to be issued once, in less than the twinkling of an eye. What can happen, then, to these two communities of creatures, man and *jinn*, when God attends fully to them alone, administering their punishment? Under the shadow of this fearful threat, they are both asked: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 32)

The *sūrah* continues with this frightening tone, challenging both man and *jinn* to pass beyond their own world: "Jinn *and mankind, if you can pass beyond the regions of heaven and earth, then do so.*" (Verse 33) How, and where to? "*You cannot pass beyond them without authority.*" (Verse 33) No authority can be given except by the One who has it. Once more, they are faced with the question: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 34) Do they have, within themselves, anything that amounts to a lie to say, or even a word to utter? Nonetheless the onslaught continues to the end, adding further threats and revealing their miserable end: "*A flash of fire will be sent against you, and molten brass, and you will be left without support. Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verses 35–36) The horror painted in this image is beyond the scope of human imagination, or any creature's imagination for that matter. It is a unique image. Although there are a few images akin to it in the Qur'ān, none are exactly similar to this one: "*Leave Me alone with those who deny the truth and enjoy life's blessings.*" (73: 11) "*Leave Me alone [to deal] with him whom I have created alone.*" (74: 11) The fact remains that this present verse, and the warning it implies, is far more frightful: "*We shall attend to you two huge communities [of* jinn *and mankind].*" (Verse 31)

The Last Day

The *sūrah* devotes its remaining part to images and scenes of the Last Day, starting with a universal upheaval, followed by images of reckoning, requital and reward. This commences with an image of the universe that fits with the opening of the *sūrah*: "*When the sky is rent asunder and becomes rose-red like [burning] oil.*" (Verse 37) We are introduced to a picture of the sky turning rose-red or looking like a red rose and

flowing like oil. The sum of the verses describing the universe on the Day of Judgement confirm the total destruction of all celestial bodies, after they break loose of the system which controls their operation and coordinates their orbits and movements. One of these verses is the one we are now discussing. Others may be cited, such as: "*When the earth is violently shaken and the mountains crumble away and scatter abroad into fine dust.*" (56: 4–6) "*When eyes are dazzled, and the moon eclipsed, and the sun and the moon are brought together.*" (75: 7–9) "*When the sun is darkened, when the stars fall and disperse, when the mountains are made to move away, when the camels, ten months pregnant, are left untended, when the wild beasts are brought together, when the seas are set alight.*" (81: 1–6) "*When the sky is cleft asunder, when the stars are scattered, when the oceans are made to explode…*" (82: 1–3) "*When the sky is rent asunder, obeying her Lord in true submission; when the earth is stretched out and casts forth all that is within her and becomes empty, obeying her Lord in true submission!*" (84: 1–5) All these verses, and many others, refer to this great event that will overcome the entire universe, the nature of which is known only to God.

"*When the sky is rent asunder and becomes rose-red like [burning] oil.*" (Verse 37) The same question is again asked: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 38) No denial can then be either contemplated or uttered.

"*On that day neither mankind nor* jinn *will be asked about their sins.*" (Verse 39) This applies to a particular situation on that day when all will be present. It is a day with different situations: in some people will be questioned and in some others no question will be put to them. In some, every soul will argue its own case, trying to put the blame on its associates, and in others no word of argument or dispute will be allowed. It is a long, extended day, with many positions and situations, each of which is awesome, and each is witnessed by multitudes of creatures. This verse speaks of a particular situation when no human or *jinn* will be asked about their sins. Everything is already well known, and the deeds of all are out in the open. Signs of misery appear as black on some faces, and signs of triumph appear white on others. Every face tells of what is going to happen. Can there by any denial on that day?

Hence, the question: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 40)

"*The guilty ones will be known by their mark and shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet.*" (Verse 41) This is a scene that combines force with humiliation: forelocks and feet are tied together and the guilty are so cast into hell. Can there be any denial then? As this is going on, the *sūrah* addresses its audience, as if they are witnessing this continuing process of casting the guilty, with their forelocks and feet combined, into hell: "*This is the hell which the guilty deny.*" (Verse 43) It is present here, as you are now seeing it. "*They will go round between its flames and scalding water.*" (Verse 44) It is exceedingly hot; they have nowhere to go other than round and between the flames and scorching fluids. Look at them as they go round now: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 45)

This is all that is said about those enduring this most painful suffering. The *sūrah* then turns its attention to those enjoying honour and bliss.

The Four Gardens

For the first time in the Qur'ān so far two gardens are mentioned, and there are probably more within the great garden of heaven. Their mention here, in particular, may be to stress their importance. In the next *sūrah*, The Inevitable Event, we learn that the dwellers of heaven form two large groups: the ones to the fore who will be brought nearest to God, and the people to the right. Each will experience great bliss. Here also we feel that these two gardens are designated for a group with a high position. It may be the group described in the next *sūrah* as being closest to God. We see another two gardens which are less refined than the first two and we feel that they belong to a group that comes next to the ones already mentioned. This group may be the people to the right. Whatever the case may be, let us look at this first grouping of two gardens, feeling their bliss. They are "*With shading branches.*" (Verse 48) The Arabic word used for branches, *afnān*, conveys in particular newly springing branches that spread an air of freshness. These gardens have "*a pair of flowing springs.*" (Verse 50) Thus, they are never short of water.

Moreover, they are "*With every kind of fruit in pairs.*" (Verse 52) Their fruits are plentiful and varied. How will the dwellers of these gardens live? "*They will recline on carpets lined with rich brocade.*" (Verse 54) Such is the lining of their couches: the top is left to our imagination. And then "*the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach.*" (Verse 54) It is near and easy to reach.

This, however, does not complete the aspects of luxury that await these people. There is still more to consider: "*In both [gardens] will be mates of modest gaze, whom neither man nor* jinn *will have touched before.*" (Verse 56) Their modest gaze reflects their chastity. They do not look to anyone other than their spouses. Besides, they instil a sense of luxury and brightness, appearing "*like rubies and corals.*" (Verse 58)

All this comes as the reward for a person who stands in this life in fear of his Lord's presence and worships Him as if he sees Him. He feels that God sees him and he works to attain the superior grade of excellence that the Prophet described as "to worship God as if you see Him. If you do not, then know that He sees you." As such they deserve more from the Lord of Grace for their excellence: "*Shall the reward of good be anything but good?*" (Verse 60)

In this presentation of these two lofty gardens and what they contain, every aspect of blessing and comfort is followed by the familiar comment: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 61)

The *sūrah* then describes what the other group, also with two gardens, will have: "*Besides these two there are two other gardens.*" (Verse 62) The description shows them to be in some way less than the first two: "*Both of the deepest green.*" (Verse 64) Their green colour is very dark, almost black. They have "*two gushing springs.*" (Verse 66) Their water gushes forth, which is again different from, or less than, the flowing water of the springs in the first two gardens. Here we have "*fruits, date-palms and pomegranate trees,* (Verse 68) while we had there "*every kind of fruit in pairs.*" (Verse 52) Moreover, "*there will be in [these gardens] all things most excellent and beautiful.*" (Verse 70) Further aspects are added in the next verse: "*[They will have] dark-eyed and modest companions, sheltered in pavilions.*" (Verse 72) The pavilions, or decorated tents, add connotations of bedouin luxury, gratifying those used to desert life. The mates they have here are '*sheltered*', while the ones in the other two gardens are '*of*

modest gaze'. However both groups of mates share in the same qualities of chastity and faithful devotion: "*Neither man nor* jinn *will have touched them before.*" (Verse 74)

We see the dwellers of these two gardens enjoying their luxuries: "*They will recline on green cushions and fine carpets.*" (Verse 76) The fine quality of the carpets in these gardens is given a special description in Arabic, *'abqarī*, which is an adjective used of the 'Abqar Valley; in olden times the Arabs believed this to be the dwelling place of the *jinn*. Hence they attributed every marvellous thing to this valley, describing it as *'abqarī*, as the carpets are here described. When compared with what the first two gardens contain, these are clearly more modest. Yet the familiar comment is added after every aspect of blessing mentioned here: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" (Verse 77)

The *sūrah* concludes with a final note of glorification of the Lord whose face, full of majesty, will remain after all creation has perished. This is the most apt conclusion to a *sūrah* that bears the name of the Lord of Grace: "*Blessed is the name of your Lord, full of majesty, granting grace.*" (Verse 78)